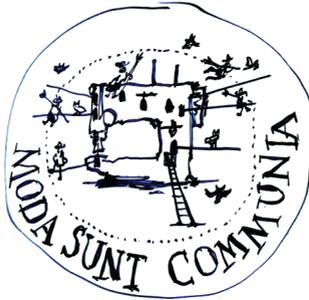


Deep Fashion Bulletin

THE SEASONAL GAZETTE FOR CRITICAL CITIZEN PEDAGOGY AND DEEP FASHION

WHAT IS “DEEP FASHION”?

We live in a consumer society, where we face a paradoxical individual freedom that, if available at all, only comes to us in the form of (limited) consumer choices. We are told to “vote with our dollars”, yet, as philosopher Herbert Marcuse posits in his famous book *One-dimensional Man* (1964), even in liberal democracies, “liberty can be made into a powerful instrument of domination. [...] Free election of masters does not abolish the masters or the slaves”.

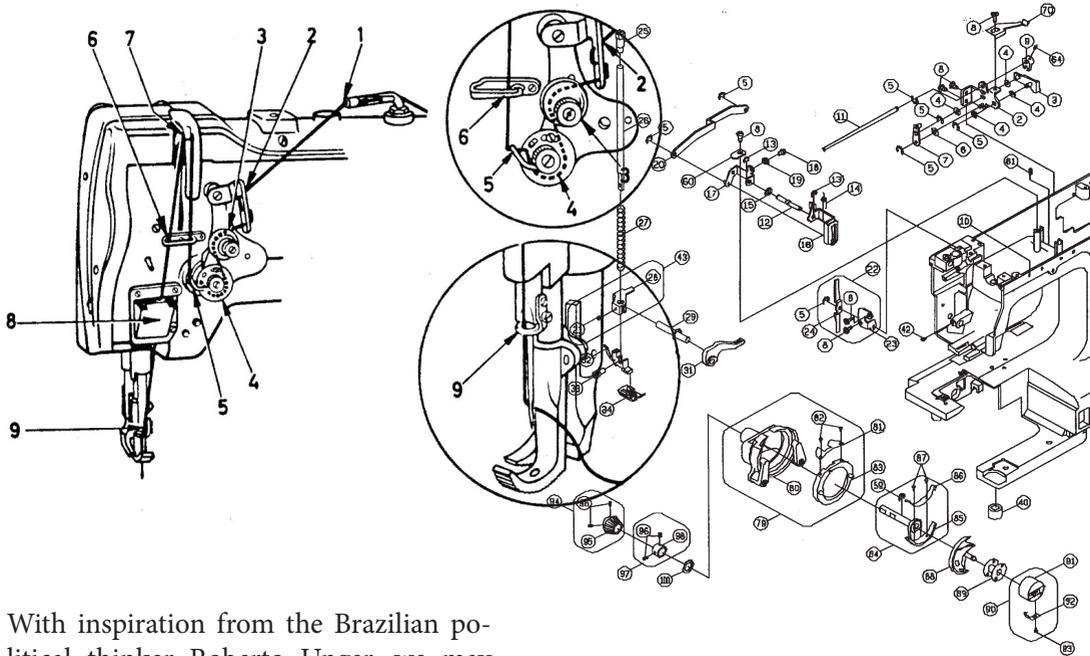


For people engaged in fashion, autonomy is a fundamental paradox, as fashion is a phenomenon that rests equally on creativity and collaboration, as well as conformity and coercion. We need critical sites and tools for hands-

on and practical examination of this core paradoxical issue:

In the practices of fashion, how can we create our own community scenes of autonomy to liberate citizen agency, yet still engage in the phenomenon of fashion?

WE MUST ASK OURSELVES: WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

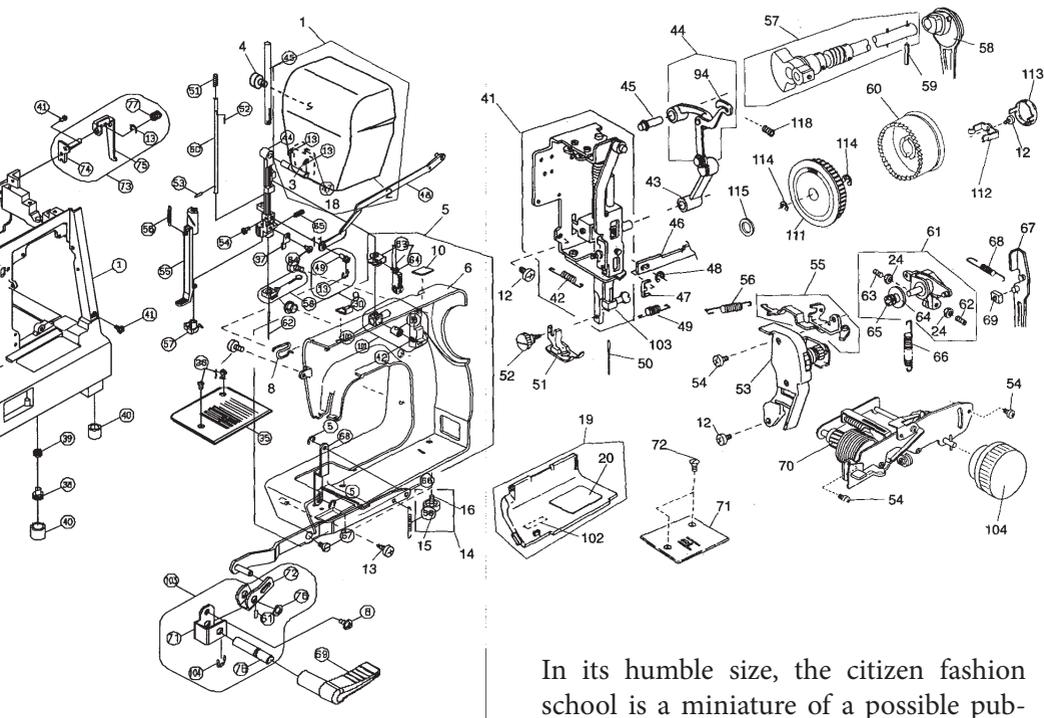


With inspiration from the Brazilian political thinker Roberto Unger, we may suggest a more engaging form of fashion, beyond the ready-to-wear paradigm. In his book *The Left Alternative* (2005), Unger envisions a “deep freedom” where our very structure of democracy is re-imagined. As Unger suggests, “the world suffers under a dictatorship of no alternatives. Although ideas all by themselves are powerless to overthrow this dictatorship we cannot overthrow it without ideas.” In a similar vein, also fashion suffers from a lack of alternatives and visions of how it could be radically different, how it could be a “deep fashion.”

One such step towards deeper engagement could be to start forming critical citizen schools for fashion, spaces to train and build courage to try out new forms of dress, new practices of fashion, rather

than keep fuelling a system dependent on anxiety-driven addiction. The establishment of such schools and safe spaces is the foundation of any pro-active resistance: a safe place to try and test ideas, a schooling of the heart and mind, to start building alternatives to the dominant logic and regime of violence. One needs a safe space to test, fail and try again within a community of peers and friends, before setting out into the hostile world outside. A critical citizen fashion school is a temporary base with one’s back covered, a platform for discussion, a boot-camp for training and sewing, and a node in a network of wider social mobilization towards deep fashion.

But we must also see that a fashion citizen school is not a place beyond



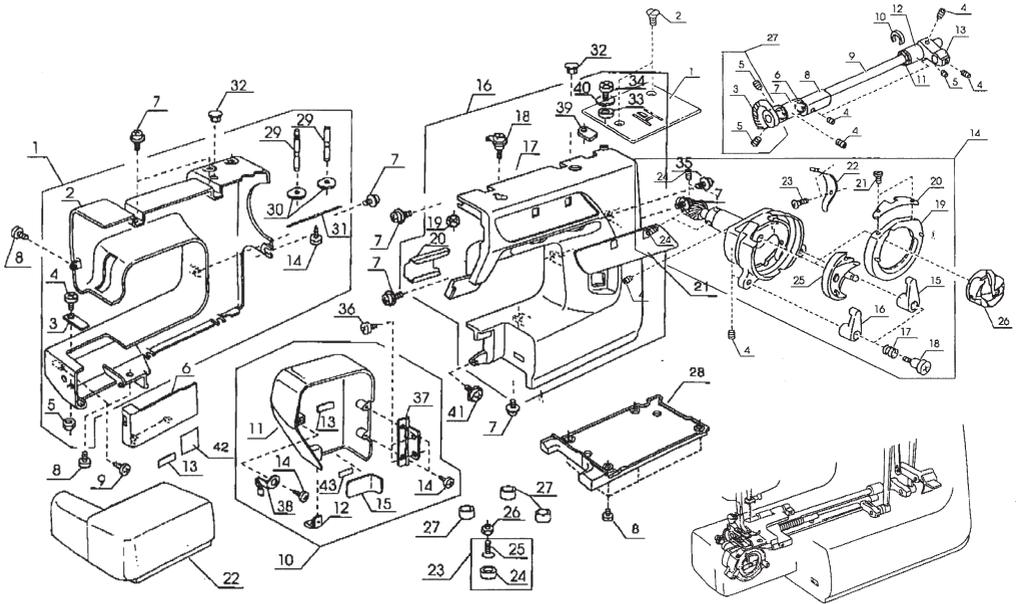
fashion, but a place where it is collectively and collaboratively disarmed and displaced with a sincere attention to the human capabilities and values of the participants. Thus a citizen school is a site of refuge, a safehouse for deeper critique.

Within its four walls, a safe space is provided, a home for the testing of thought and action, for constructive sharing, argument and contestation. It is a space for dependency and loyalty, of deep honesty and a plurality of strengths and weaknesses, shared hopes and where equality is assured. It is a place where to test action with others, because, as Arendt argues in *The Human Condition* (1959), "action [...] is never possible in isolation."

In its humble size, the citizen fashion school is a miniature of a possible public realm, a guarded outpost within four walls: a model of the world in which we may try to challenge the consensus and tyrannical power of thoughtlessness. It is a workshop, a shared prototyping of reality, where a deeper public and a renewed truthfulness may be discovered. Mediating such radically empowered human togetherness through the realm of dress may indeed be a form of deep fashion.

A set of programs can occur within a citizen fashion school to foster deep fashion:

- training and sharing of skills: An essential asset in resistance is skill, skill to withstand, construct and strategize future actions. But training involves a lot of failing,



and it takes courage to fail, and it may be very risky in the face on an enemy. Thus, foremost a citizen fashion school must be a training facility, a bastion of disciplined endeavors towards deeper engagements with identity production and a widened sense of fashion practices.

- the formation of fashion affinity groups:

An affinity group is a community and micro-society strengthened over time by training. The group allows for members to maintain a strong sense of shared support, while individuals may still take on own initiatives and maintains agency, thus bridging the gap between larger society and community, and the individual. Thus forming an affinity group is vital for fashion activists, as the support and strength provided by such group serves as the lynchpin for future actions, sustained duration and productive resistance.

- critical pedagogy for deep fashion: For a deep fashion to be built, there is an urgent need for full framework of representation and critique within all the institutions of fashion: critical pedagogy, media literacy, dress skills and tools for public engagement. Almost any pedagogic space can become a critical citizen fashion school, refusing the reproduction of fashion fear and status stress. The school acts in a pro-active way, producing interpersonal skills of cooperation, community and distributive commons.

text by Otto von Busch, fashion educator, New York

References:

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 Marcuse Herbert (1964) *One-dimensional Man*, Boston: Beacon.
 Unger, Roberto (2005) *The Left Alternative*, London: Verso